

THE VALUE AND EMPLOYMENT OF HOSPITAL SHIPS

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A hospital ship which can accompany a fleet at sea and provide hospital services even when thousands of miles from shore hospitals and shore stations, has long been used by navies. It is known with certainty that hospital ships were part of the Greek and Roman navies in ancient times. They were found among the fleets of the Crusaders and the Italian republics in the Middle Ages. During the naval wars of the 18th centuries both the British and French navies had hospital ships. Sir Gilbert Blane, the great naval sanitarian, whose administrative recommendations resulted in the conquest of scurvy and smallpox in the Royal Navy, was a strong advocate of hospital ships and employed them to great advantage. The abolition of scurvy and smallpox in the British Navy and the use of hospital ships during the Napoleonic Wars had much to do with the successful prosecution of the naval war by Great Britain.

The functions which the hospital ship performs may be summed up as follows:

1. Provide medical and surgical care to the patients from the fleet, including definitive treatment in many cases, in the areas where no naval hospital is available.
2. Provide evacuation for seriously sick and wounded cases from the fleet.